

AUTHOR'S ACCOUNT

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Betrothal. Young girl proposed for by the suitor's parents.

It is usual for a girl to be betrothed to a man, or literally "retained" (*e tulu ghore*)¹ by him, when she is in about her sixth or seventh year. A man chooses the girl he wants to marry, but negotiations are carried out exclusively between the respective parents, the girl herself not being consulted. The proposal is made by the suitor's father or mother, one of whom goes to the girl's father and says, "Wouldn't it be a good thing if my son were to marry your daughter?" If the father agrees, an appointment is made for two or three days later, when the suitor's parents (still not the suitor himself) return, bringing with them a single pig, of any size up to that of a crescent-tusker, and ten or twenty money-mats. By this payment the girl is officially "retained." The new set of kinship terms resulting from the proposed alliance are immediately adopted, and at every subsequent feast or ceremony held in their respective villages the suitor and the girl's parents must present to one another the customary pigs, as if the girl were already married. Needless to say, the balance of gain is strongly on the side of the prospective parents-in-law.

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Bride-price.

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When the girl has arrived at the proper age, negotiations are entered into concerning the bride-price. The pigs which the suitor proposes to pay are displayed to the girl's father, who usually objects that they are not many or good enough. The suitor then produces others. In the haggling that follows the prospective father-in-law has completely the whip-hand. If he is still dissatisfied with the proposed bride-price he will say, "Never mind, my daughter can wait," and the suitor and his family are sent scouring the country, to bargain or beg for yet further pigs from their friends. They cannot protest or threaten not to take the girl away, for they would then lose not only the pigs paid at betrothal, but also all those presented to her father at every subsequent rite.

Bride left with her husband. Payment.

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At last the price is agreed upon, and the suitor's parents (still not the suitor himself) go to the girl's father and appoint a day when he shall come and leave his daughter with her new husband. This is called *e tulo ni*, "he conducts her." On the appointed day the girl's Lodge-brothers come to the suitor, bringing a basket of yams for each pig that is to be paid. Returning home, they oil and decorate the bride and she

¹ Compare the name of the betrothal rite recorded by Codrington from Oba and called *huhu ruhe gorae*, meaning "to give her suck with a drinking coconut and secure her" (Codrington, 3, p. 241).

STONE MEN OF MALEKULA

584 The ceremony of betrothal consists in a presentation by the young man's parents to the girl's relatives of several pigs and three or four pounds in English money,¹ saying, "*Kam tulo gore*,"² "We have retained her." The news immediately spreads, and from this moment the betrothed girl becomes taboo; she is now under the vigilant watch of her future husband and of his parents. The betrothal is always accompanied by a feast.

Date fixed for the wedding. Pigs and yams collected.

583 Several months later, a date is fixed after the coming yam harvest, when the marriage ceremony is to take place. Meanwhile, the young man's clansmen, his father, father's brothers, his own brothers, his paternal cousins, toil to collect the twenty or so tusked boars and the thirty or forty pounds which will be necessary to pay for the girl.³ On their side, the girl's relatives go to their gardens every day to dig up the desired number of yams—two or three hundred. These yams are brought to the young man's village and stored on great yam-tables constructed from bamboos in the form of a platform; this platform rests on stakes, about three feet from the ground, in order to preserve the yams from the ravages of the pigs which roam over the island. The young man's people also dig yams, but in smaller quantity.

Preparations for the wedding. Decoration of yam poles.

585 One or two weeks before the appointed day, the men, youths and boys set about energetically cutting bamboo poles, to which each individual's share of the yams will be attached. These bamboo poles, about twelve feet long, are garlanded with wild flowers, dark red, with strong, almost fadeless petals, called *lok-lok*.⁴

Each works at his allotted task, and the preparations for the ceremony advance. All of a sudden, it is announced that the great occasion is fixed for the day following the next full moon; there are only two days left. Orders are given to keep the pigs ready for delivery; others are given to complete the decorating of the bamboo poles. These famous bamboo poles are arranged thus. The young men, with a hibiscus flower or two jauntily stuck into their hair on one side of their heads, carry the poles to the front of the husband's house; one end is cut so as to form a fork. An arm's length below the fork are attached two or three yams, according to the rank of him, or of those, for whom they are intended; then, between the yams and the fork, they tie on the red *lok-lok* flower; to this

¹ Replacing the ceremonial mats (*mangau*) still in use during the investigations.

² Godefroy's *tulo gore* is equivalent to my *tulu ghore* (see p. 192).

³ Compare the ten pigs said by Harrison (2, p. 26) to compose the bride-price at Matanavat. But this is a vague statement, as neither the rank nor value of the pigs is given.

⁴ *Amaranthus*.

who had returned to his own people and was busy reviving the fortunes of his village in the same way. These two men were among my best informants, since they themselves were conscious learners from the older men and, like all learners, the most capable of passing on their knowledge. 198 196

Nor were the people of Atchin averse to using such aspects of the white man's material culture as would seem to them to further their interests. 198 199 241
Though stone tools were still used for gardening and shell tools for carving, some natives possessed knives, but such things were not common, and the degradation in plastic art which everywhere followed on their introduction had, at the time of my visit, only recently begun to show itself. It seemed, by the way, most curious to me that, with the tremendous labour of digging in hard ground with nothing better than hard-wood sticks, no white man had thought of introducing more efficient agricultural implements, but none such existed. The hard-earned white man's money obtained on distant 198 199

travels was used almost exclusively with two objects in view. One was the purchase of whaleboats to replace their former long-distance canoes in order to facilitate the trade in and exchange of pigs in other islands. The second, closely connected with it, had as its result the only real benefit conferred by the white man, indirectly and without his knowledge, on the native. When I arrived on Atchin I was surprised at the number of young men who spoke pidgin English. It was not till I had been some time on the island that the reason for this became apparent. One of the least desirable aspects of the social system in this and the neighbouring islands was polygamy which, since most of the older men had two wives, effectually prevented the younger men from marrying until a comparatively late age. Wives are bought with the most valuable currency known in Atchin, namely pigs. So the younger men seized the opportunity created by the system of indentured labour to sign on for three years, without, like other natives, running up debts at the trader's store, so that with the money thus earned they might, on their return, buy pigs with which to purchase wives. This wholly beneficial revolution in the social machinery was in full swing at the time of my visit, but Mr. Harrison tells me, and this is one of the most interesting points of comparison between then and now, that the old men have now turned tables on the young, and by devaluing the pig in terms of women and increasing the bride-price from eight or nine pigs to fifty or sixty, have thus restored the old equilibrium, and incidentally, presumably, their own authority. When we reflect upon the fact that the young men twenty-two years ago are the older men now we have a useful sidelight on one of the mechanisms governing the rise and fall of revolutions. 150 198 583 198

Another effect of the increased wealth in pigs thus gained was the elimination of the lower grades from the *Maki* hierarchy. This process was not primarily due to the wealth so gained, but, like so many other changes in native custom, was very much accentuated by it. In all other parts of Malekula the *Maki*, as has already been pointed out, is a graded hierarchy in which the grades are taken by individuals, and the taking of them demands great expenditure of pigs and other forms of wealth, so that when a man has reached the highest grade called *Mal* he is a very great man and jealous of his distinction. The tendency in such districts was consequently to increase the number of pre- 554 199 198

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182 chief's daughter has been given up for years, Atchin contradicts his theory in fact. Baker I think underestimates the vanity of the native.

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182 The Atchinese are among the very few peoples friendly to the administration, and they now appeal at once for peaceful settlements to all disputes. In the old days they gave a lot of trouble, but living on a small island they found a warship was more significant to them than to the bushmen. War is no more, abortion uncommon; the older men consciously want the place to grow; and grow it does. Thus it was the Atchinese who drew my attention to the exorbitantly high pig payments demanded as bride price all over the area in recent years; with their support I was able to lower the price by 80 per cent., back to pre-white level, thus enabling young men to marry with only normal difficulty. Similarly these folk like European medicines for introduced diseases, but use their own for the endemic ones. Their pig transactions and graded-society (*Maki*) rites have been modified; some things have been taken away, others added, both from white and black sources.

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182 Atchin dances are second only to those of Matanavat; they are kept up with exactitude and enthusiasm; also with new and often spontaneous variations in one type of the *na-leng*, the highest manifestation of Hebridean art and living. Sorcery and poison are no longer tolerated; the Atchinese are bitter against the adjacent island Vao for continuing these practices—bitter, but not disbelieving. Magic is no longer important; old legends and stories, in which these people excel, are a part of daily life and juvenile instruction; the same myths collected by Layard and myself in 1914 and 1935 respectively agree perfectly, there has been no deterioration. The old burial rites and beliefs survive unimpaired.

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182 In general the old customs that are savage or anti-social under modern conditions have disappeared, while those with business, religious, health, or play value have survived, even expanded. It is in this Europeanized heathenism, this intelligently primitive and adaptive but obstinate outlook, that the ancient Melanesian culture is most likely and able to survive. On Atchin to-day every village has its great drums, in lovely dancing glades, dolmens, carved human and bird effigies; a little distance away behind a native-style stone wall is a cluster of palm houses kept clean; at one corner perhaps a cement and iron house, the men's lodge, pride of the place. The women have more status, charm, freedom, and gaiety than elsewhere in the area.

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181 I found the Atchinese charming people—and charm is a word I seldom think of applying to a Melanesian. They are thoroughly independent and sophisticated, combining Melanesian business ability with a more Polynesian intelligence and grace to direct it. The planters and missionaries have no good word to say for Atchin, which is an indication. Few tribes have had the good luck and intelligence to use the white man's things for their own advantage, in harmony with their own culture. I believe that what the Hebridean needs most to-day is guidance in this direction associated with simple medical aid. New education, religion and outlet are unnecessary and inadvisable now, and perhaps for some time to come. A few sympathetic men and women, without undue prejudice, could with a little money and many medicines work wonders. Atchin might well serve as a model in cultural adaptation. It